



Notice of Preparation

Draft Environmental Impact Report

San Francisquito Creek Flood Reduction Project

East Bayshore Road to San Francisco Bay

This notice announces that a draft environmental impact report (EIR) will be prepared for the San Francisquito Creek Flood Protection Project (Project) to identify, evaluate, and disclose possible environmental impacts, and to develop strategies to avoid, reduce, or compensate for any significant impacts.

As the lead agency responsible for compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority (SFCJPA) has determined that the Project may have a significant impact on the physical environment, and has decided to prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) to provide ample opportunity for public disclosure and public participation in the planning and decision making process. The purpose of the draft EIR process is to develop and assess a recommended plan, identify feasible alternatives for the Project, and to avoid and mitigate significant adverse effects on environmental resources.

This document, which serves as the Notice of Preparation (NOP) required by CEQA and the state's CEQA Guidelines (*14 CCR 15082*), contains a brief description of the Project, including the Project's goals and objectives, possible environmental impacts, and the resulting need for an EIR. It also discusses the process that will be used to determine the scope of analysis in the EIR, and provides an overview of the public's opportunities for participation in review of the EIR, along with contact information.

Project Overview

Background

The San Francisquito Creek watershed encompasses the cities of East Palo Alto, Palo Alto, and Menlo Park, among others. The San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority, a government agency composed of these three cities and the Santa Clara Valley Water District and San Mateo County Flood Control District, was formed in 1999 following the floods of February 1998. The SFCJPA serves as a vehicle for the local communities and private landowners to develop cooperative and integrated strategies to flood management, and ecosystem and recreational enhancements throughout the watershed.

This initial capital project (Project) will protect people and property from flooding within the creek, along the lower section of San Francisquito Creek, from U.S. Highway 101 to the San Francisco Bay. Concurrently, Caltrans is in the process of replacing the Highway 101 (and frontage roads) crossing over San Francisquito Creek to improve motorized and non-motorized traffic flow, and has agreed to improve the Creek conveyance capacity under the crossing as part of their project. The SFCJPA is also working as the local sponsor with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to initiate a long-term and large scale, comprehensive flood management and ecosystem restoration plan for the entire watershed.

Goals and Objectives

The Project's goals are to improve flood protection, habitat, and recreational opportunities within the project reach, with the following specific objectives:

- protect properties and infrastructure between Highway 101 and the San Francisco Bay from San Francisquito Creek flows resulting from 100 year riverine flood¹ flows in conjunction with a 100-year tide and projected Sea Level Rise;
- accommodate future flood protection measures farther upstream of the project that may be constructed;
- enhance habitat along the project reach, particularly habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- enhance recreational uses; and
- minimize operational and maintenance requirements.

Project Setting

San Francisquito Creek (Creek) is a perennial stream that originates in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains and drains a watershed that is approximately 45 mi² in size from Skyline Boulevard to the San Francisco Bay. The watershed contains three manmade lakes (Searsville, Lagunita, and Felt) and tributary creeks including Los Trancos, West Union, Alambique, Bear, and Corte Madera, as well as many smaller tributaries that drain into the creeks. San Francisquito Creek begins at the confluence of Corte Madera Creek and Bear Creek just downstream of Searsville Dam and flows through Stanford University and the communities of Menlo Park, Palo Alto and East Palo to San Francisco Bay. Most of the San Francisquito Creek watershed lies in the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Bay Foothills west of Palo Alto; the remaining 7.5 mi² of the watershed lies on the San Francisquito alluvial fan near San Francisco Bay.

San Francisquito Creek represents the boundary between Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties within the study area. It is located within the Santa Clara Valley Water District's Northwest Flood Control Zone and San Mateo County's San Francisquito Creek Flood Control Zone.

¹ The 100-year flood, or base flood, is more accurately described as having a 1% annual exceedance probability, since it is an event with a flood stage that has a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any single year. The "100-year" flood is a recurrence interval determined statistically, and could theoretically occur in any year, more than once in 100 years, potentially even more than once in the same year, or may never occur.

Land uses adjacent to San Francisquito Creek in the upper reach are protected open space and residential land uses. Land uses in the lower reach are residential, light industrial, recreational, and protected baylands. The north side of the project reach is bordered by residences and by tidal salt marsh; the south side of the lower reach is bordered by businesses, the International School of the Peninsula, the Baylands Athletic Center, the Palo Alto Municipal Golf Course, and the Palo Alto Airport.

Flooding has been a common occurrence from San Francisquito Creek. The most recent flood event occurred as a result of record creek flows in February 1998, when the Creek overtopped its banks in several areas, affecting approximately 1,700 residential and commercial structures and causing more than \$26.6 million in property damages. The maximum instantaneous peak flow recorded during the February 1998 event was 7,200 cfs (on February 3, 1998) and is estimated by the USGS at approximately a 50-year event. It is predicted that the 100-year flood event would damage approximately 5,700 properties.

Project Description

Consistent with the requirements of CEQA and the state's CEQA Guidelines, the SFCJPA has and is continuing to conduct a multi-stage development, outreach, and screening process to identify a range of approaches that would meet Project goals and objectives. All of the approaches identified to date rely on a combination of several types of elements to increase flood conveyance and/or improve management of flood flows throughout the San Francisquito Watershed.

The project would ultimately increase stream flow capacity from the downstream face of East Bayshore Road to San Francisco Bay. It would reduce local flood risks during storm events, as well as provide the capacity needed for upstream flood protection projects being planned by the SFCJPA.

Increasing the Creek's flow capacity from San Francisco Bay to Highway 101 would be achieved by:

- Widening the Creek channel within the reach to convey peak flows for 100-year storm events.
- Removing an un-maintained levee-type structure downstream of Friendship Bridge to allow flood flows from the Creek channel into the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve north of the Creek.
- Configuring flood walls in the upper part of the reach for consistency with structure for Caltrans' enlargement of the Highway 101/East Bayshore Road Bridge over San Francisquito Creek.

Project elements include

- flood walls in the upper project reach downstream of East Bayshore Road,
- levee setbacks and creek widening in the middle reach between East Palo Alto and the golf course, and
- an overflow terrace at a marsh elevation along the Baylands Preserve.

These elements are shown in Figure 1. For description purposes, the “right” levee refers to the San Mateo County side of the stream and “left” levee refers to the Santa Clara County side of the stream. The upper reach of the Project is from East Bayshore Road to Daphne Way, the middle reach is from Daphne Way to Friendship Bridge, and the lower reach is from Friendship Bridge to San Francisco Bay.

In the upper reach downstream of East Bayshore Road, to maximize flow conveyance, the channel would be widened to include any available open space on the outboard sides of the right and left levees. Floodwalls would be built on either side of the channel from East Bayshore Road to roughly just downstream of the Baylands Athletic Center to accommodate flows while minimizing the need to acquire property. On the left bank, the channel would be widened by 30 feet beginning at San Francisquito Creek Pump Station in Palo Alto and ending near the basketball court next to the International School. Downstream of this, the left levee would be shifted back by approximately 50 feet, through the reach adjacent to the post office parking lot and the baseball field overflow parking lot. The interior sides of the right and left levees would be vertical and the marshplain terraces in the channel would extend from the low-flow channel to the edge of the floodwalls.

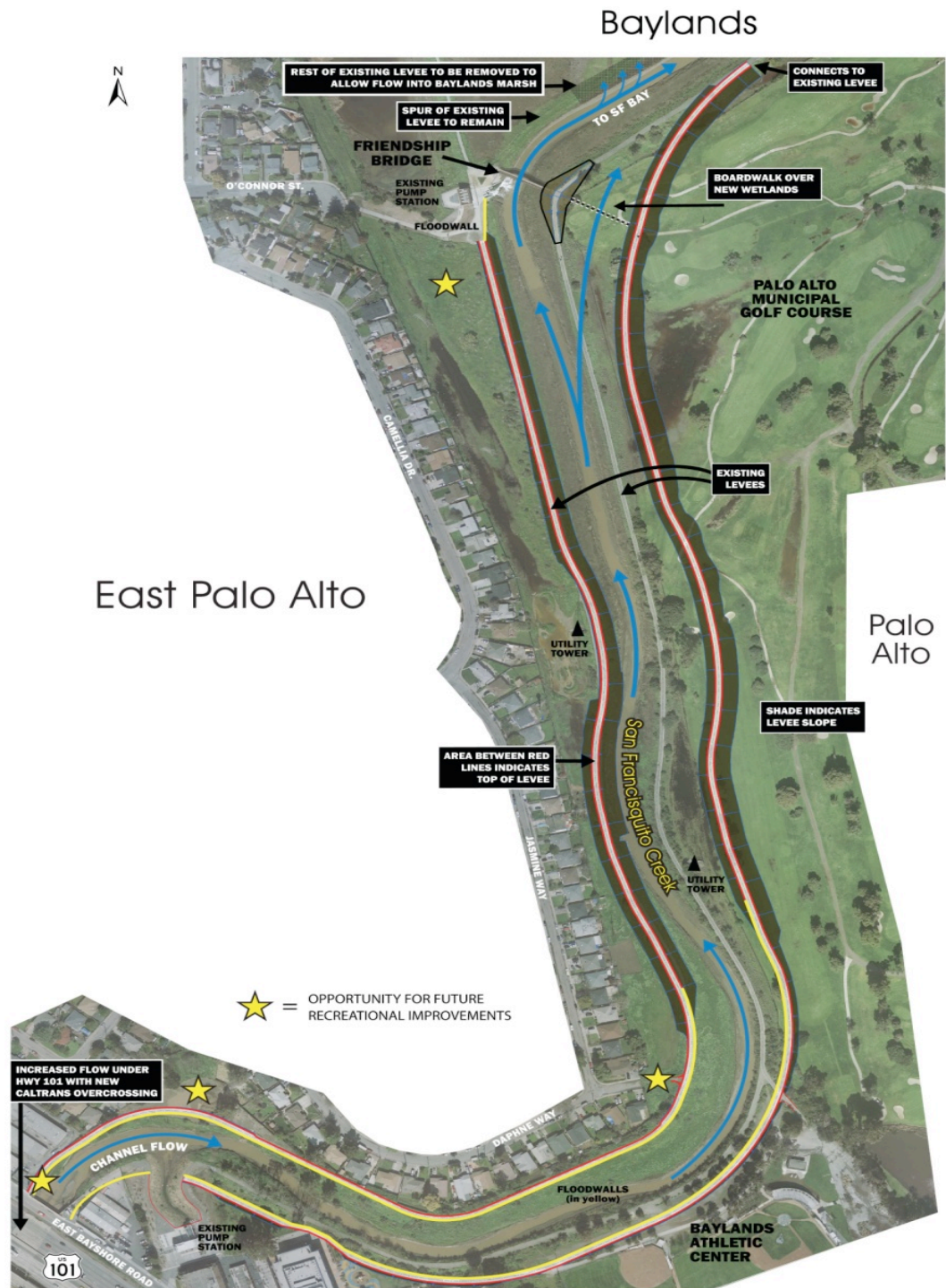
In the middle reach, from the end of Daphne Way to Friendship Bridge, the right levee would be improved to meet USACE standards in the same alignment as the existing right levee, minimizing the intrusion of the project on East Palo Alto residences. The left levee, however, would extend further east by approximately 100 feet or more. This would require a revision/realignment of at least three holes at the Palo Alto Golf Course.

Adjacent to the existing Friendship Bridge, the project would include an overflow terrace that would be graded to an elevation equal to the mean higher high water (MHHW) tide mark. This would create a continuous tidal marsh beginning in the downstream reach, surrounding the Friendship Bridge’s southeast approach, and extending upstream along the creek’s left bank. The bypass terrace would be inundated during spring tides and most moderate stream flow events. Pedestrians would be able to access the Friendship Bridge by means of a boardwalk span over the marshplain bypass terrace. An island supporting the bridge’s southeast approach would be retained in the center of the new channel to support the existing left bank footings of Friendship Bridge.

Downstream of Friendship Bridge, the left levee would continue to be set back into the golf course for approximately another 600 feet past Friendship Bridge, at which point it would tie into the existing levee. Improvements to the left bank levee would end at this point, and the existing left bank levee would be retained downstream to the Bay. The right bank levee would be retained and improved for approximately 100 feet downstream of Friendship Bridge and then would be lowered by 2-5 feet. This lowering would allow water to flow onto the adjacent baylands during flood events, but the top of the lowered levee would remain above MHHW. The extent of the levee lowering could be taken all the way downstream to the Bay.

The project will be designed to create several acres of new tidal wetland habitat, providing ecological enhancements for endangered and common species that are found within the project area. The project will also allow for new and improved access and trails for residents and visitors along the Creek and near S.F. Bay.

Figure 1. San Francisquito Creek Flood Reduction Project Elements



The current flood control alignment is likely to require relocation of or additional structural work to the following major utilities.

- One PG&E transmission tower would now be located within the channel.
- Several PG&E transmission wood poles would need to be relocated outside of the new levee footprint.
- A PG&E gas main will need to be relocated outside of the new levee footprint, likely crossing the channel in a new location.
- A sanitary sewer line would need to be extended and manholes would need to be relocated outside of the new levee footprint.
- Several storm sewer lines would need to be abandoned or relocated outside of the new levee footprint.

A number of factors make the proposed Project reaches of the creek the top priority of the SFCJPA's flood management efforts:

- San Francisquito Creek is at highest risk of severe flooding from both fluvial (flows coming down from the foothills) and tidal sources.
- Previous flood events on these reaches of the creek have caused considerable damage and dislocation to communities along its length.
- Increasing downstream capacity is a necessary first step to providing comprehensive flood protection, as upstream flow improvements cannot be implemented until downstream capacity has been adequately increased.

As such, this proposed initial project is important both as an immediate flood protection measure with localized benefits and as a key piece of the SFCJPA's comprehensive flood management strategy. Consequently, design of the SF Bay to Highway 101 project is on an accelerated schedule, with design and environmental review expected to be complete so that construction can begin in the summer of 2011. The Santa Clara Valley Water District and the San Mateo County Flood Control District have contributed funding for the design and environmental planning of the project, and the SFCJPA is working with its member agencies to secure existing local funding for construction of the project.

Possible Environmental Impacts and Need for EIR

Based on a preliminary review performed by the SFCJPA, the following environmental resources could be affected by construction of the Project.

- Visual resources.
- Traffic flow.
- Recreation
- Ambient noise.
- Air quality.
- Biological resources.

- Cultural and paleontological resources.
- Water quality.

Because of the potential for significant impacts on the environment, the SFCJPA has decided to prepare an EIR. The draft EIR will analyze the topic areas identified above in detail, and any others for which potentially significant impacts are identified, and will propose measures to mitigate (avoid, reduce, or compensate) for any impacts evaluated as significant.

EIR Scoping Process

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) initiates the CEQA scoping process, through which the SFCJPA will refine the range of issues and Project alternatives to be addressed in the draft EIR.

The public is invited to comment on the proposal to prepare the EIR and on the scope of issues to be included in the EIR. A scoping meeting will be held on Thursday, September 30th, 2010 in Palo Alto.

- 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the International School of the Peninsula, 151 Laura Lane, Palo Alto, CA 94303.

Please submit any comments by 5:00 p.m., Friday, October 15th, 2010, to Kevin Murray, the SFCJPA's project manager (see *Contact Information* below).

Public Participation in EIR Review

All interested persons and organizations who wish to be notified when the draft EIR is available for review should respond to this notice and provide a current address (see *Contact Information* below). The SFCJPA will compile a list of interested parties and will provide notice when the draft EIR is available. When completed in 2011, the draft EIR will undergo a 60-day public review and comment period. Information about availability of the draft EIR will also be posted on the SFCJPA's website (<http://www.sfcjpa.org>).

Contact Information

For further information, contact the following.

Kevin Murray, Project Manager
San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority
1231 Hoover Street
Menlo Park, CA 94025
650-561-4580

Additional information relevant to the project and the draft EIR can also be found at <http://www.sfcjpa.org>.